

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
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P R 100902Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1794
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMENBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USMISSION SINAI

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E.O.11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS
SUBJ: BEGIN DECISION ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ENCOUNTERS
OPPOSITION

1. ISRAEL'S NEW PRESIDENT WILL BE ELECTED BY THE KNESSET IN A SECRET BALLOT ON APRIL 5. A TRADITION SEEMS TO BE DEVELOPING THAT THE LARGELY CEREMONIAL OFFICE SHOULD BE FILLED BY AN ACADEMICIAN, PREFERABLY A SCIENTIST. FOLLOWING KATZIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT LAST DECEMBER NOT TO RUN AGAIN, PRIME MINISTER BEGIN EXPRESSED HIS DESIRE THAT THE NEXT PRESIDENT COME FROM THE SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY, A DECLARATION THAT EMBITTERED THE LIBERAL PARTY WHICH HAD PUSHED THE CANDIDACY OF ITS RETIRED CHAIRMAN, POLISH-BORN ELIMELECH RIMALT.

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2. SPECULATION HAS INTENSIFIED AS ELECTION DAY APPROACHES, SWITCHING FROM ONE SEPHARDIC PERSONALITY TO ANOTHER. FOR A PERIOD IT WAS PROFESSOR ANDRE CHOURAQUI, A HISTORIAN FROM ALGERIA WHO AT ONE TIME WAS ACTIVE IN THE RAFI FACTION OF THE LABOR PARTY. HOWEVER, IN RECENT DAYS ATTENTION SWITCHED TO ALIGNMENT MK STZZHAK NAVON, WHOSE BID FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN 1973 FAILED THROUGH LACK OF SUPPORT FROM HIS OWN PARTY. THOUGH BORN IN ISRAEL-

NAVON COMES FROM IMPECCABLE SEPHARDIC STOCK AND THERE WERE RUMORS A FEW DAYS AGO THAT HE HAD BEGIN'S SUPPORT. HUMILIATED IN THE 1973 DEFEAT, NAVON HAS REFUSED TO PUSH HIS CANDIDACY THIS TIME.

3. IT WAS REPORTED YESTERDAY THAT BEGIN HAD DECIDED ON A CANDIDATE; HE IS EGYPTIAN-BORN PROFESSOR YITZHAK CHAVET, A NUCLEAR PHYSICIST AND A POLITICAL UNKNOWN WHO HEAD THE NAHAL SOREQ CENTER FOR NUCLEAR RESEARCH. BEGIN ENCOUNTERED OPPOSITION IMMEDIATELY. A HAARETZ EDITORIAL CRITICIZED BEGIN FOR SURPRISING THE PUBLIC BY GIVING THE NOD TO SOMEONE WHOSE

"CURRICULUM VITAE IS TOO NARROW TO PERMIT AN EVALUATION OF HIS CAPABILITIES AS A PUBLIC FIGURE." THE PAPER IMPLIED THAT CHAVET'S ONLY CLAIM TO CONSIDERATION WAS HIS PLACE OF BIRTH.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, NAVON IS POPULAR ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. HE IS A DOVISH, BALANCED POLITICIAN WHO APPEALS TO MOST MODERATES. HE IS ALSO ACCEPTABLE TO MANY HAWKS, WHO RECALL HIS RAFI CONNECTIONS. LA'AM, FOR EXAMPLE, LOOKS KINDLY ON HIM BECAUSE OF NAVON'S PAST CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH BEN-GURION. HIS OWN PARTY WOULD PROBABLY SUPPORT HIM, ALBEIT WITH MIXED FEELINGS, SINCE HIS ELECTION WOULD REDOUND TO THE CREDIT OF BEGIN AND THE LABOR PARTY WOULD LOSE A VALUABLE VOTE GETTER AMONG THE SEPHARDIM. IN SHORT, IF HE WERE TO RUN HE COULD MAKE IT CLOSE, REGARDLESS OF WHOM BEGIN ENDORSED.
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5. BEGIN MET WITH LIKUD FACTION LEADERS TODAY AND THEN WITH COALITION PARTY HEADS. IT WAS ANNOUNCED AFTER THE MEETING THAT IT HAD BEEN DECIDED TO POSTPONE THE FINAL DECISION ON THE CANDIDATE UNTIL AFTER BEGIN'S RETURN FROM THE U.S. IT APPEARS THAT THE RACE IS STILL OPEN, NOTWITHSTANDING BEGIN'S APPARENTLY HAVING MADE UP HIS MIND.
VIETS

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